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THE PAST STATE, AND PRESENT PROSPECTS OF THE CHURCH.

A Sermon,

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Psalm cii. 13, 14.—"*Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.*"

THIS Psalm was probably composed by one of the Prophets, during the captivity of Israel in Babylon. We consider it not merely as an effusion of the personal sorrows and anxieties of its author, but as giving utterance to the feelings and desires of the true servants of Jehovah during that long and cheerless season of adversity and affliction. Jerusalem, their holy city, was then trampled under foot by hostile armies; and the beautiful temple where their fathers worshipped, was demolished by the ruthless hand of the victor, and reduced to a ruinous mass of stones and rubbish. The pious exiles, driven from their homes and their altars—deprived of their personal liberty, and of those religious privileges which were dearer to them than life itself, gave vent to the desponding feelings of their sorrow-stricken hearts. *By the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept.* Their harps, which had so often been used in celebrating the praises of Jehovah, were now hung upon the willows;—and as the winds passed over them, gave forth mournful sounds in unison with the melancholy feelings of the captives. Their lordly oppressors, cruelly sporting with their sorrows, required them to chant the songs of Zion. But how could they make *melody in their heavi-*

ness? or sing the Lord's song in a strange land? They could sigh at the recollection of their former comforts and privileges: —they could weep freely in repentance for their sins: but never could they rejoice again till they should see the spires of their holy city raised from the dust; till their feet were once more permitted to stand in the midst of Jerusalem;—and their sublime strains of praise to echo through the vaulted arches of Zion.

The sorrows of God's people during that captivity, are most vividly described in the Psalm before us. *Their heart was smitten and withered like grass, so that they forgot to eat their bread: their enemies reproached them all the day: they ate ashes like bread and mingled their drink with weeping:*—and more intolerable than all the outward sufferings inflicted by their oppressors, was their inward agony of mind, arising from the consciousness that all their afflictions were deserved as just displays of God's *indignation and wrath* against the sins and infidelities of his chosen people.

It is scarcely possible to conceive of a deeper state of degradation and suffering, than that which the pencil of inspiration has pictured in this psalm. A cloud of dark and awful aspect, was at that time spread over Israel, and there was nothing to diminish the perfect gloominess of the prospect but the bow of promise distinctly painted upon the cloud. They knew that God loved Zion, and stood pledged to favour her with prosperity. And when their outward trials had reached their utmost pitch, and they were duly humbled in repentance for their sins, they believed that the time for God's purposed display of mercy was near at hand;—and cheered by the prospect of returning blessings, they with one heart and voice exclaimed, as in the language of the Text—*Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.*

It is proposed in the following discourse,

First, to illustrate the general truth plainly declared in the text, that *God has set times for favouring his church, and that they generally follow periods of the greatest darkness and depression.*

Secondly—*to make an application of this truth to the state and prospects of our own Church and the duties of its members.*

I. God probably created the earth for the sake of placing his Church upon it, as the theatre in which his attributes would be most illustriously exhibited, and the field from which the most valued honours of his name would be gathered. He loves his Church with an everlasting love, and as his chosen and betrothed bride, uniformly beholds her with the utmost tenderness and favour. But, notwithstanding this, there are vicissitudes in her condition. She is at some times depressed, and at others prosperous—sometimes covered with the sable habiliments of mourning; and at others, arrayed in the gay vestments of joy. So that to human appearance there are seasons of gracious visitation, when the Lord favours his Church more than at others, and those seasons usually follow times of the lowest depression.

For the illustration of this general truth we might appeal to the history of the chosen people, under the Old Testament. How apparently desperate was the state of the Church, and how low were the hopes of Abraham, that the Divine promise would be fulfilled, when God gave him a son in his old age, from whom the seed was to spring, in which all families of the earth were to be blessed? How wretched was the state of the Israelites under the tyranny of the Egyptian monarch, and their lordly task-masters—how slender was their hope of deliverance, and how near were they to an abandonment of their anticipations respecting Canaan, when the Lord brought them out, with a "high hand, and stretched out arm," to fulfil the promise which he made unto their fathers, and to establish his holy covenant? To what lower pitch of degradation could Israel have fallen than during the seventy years of captivity in Babylon? Yet, in the midst of depression and sorrow, which the strong imagery of this Psalm but faintly describes, the Lord rescued them from their oppressors, caused the walls of Zion to be rebuilt, and his face to shine upon her desolations. And thus we shall uniformly find, in the perusal of their history, that when his people's sufferings were at the highest, and their hopes at the lowest, *his time to favour Zion, yea his set time was at hand.*

But why should we linger in the twilight, when we are permitted to view God's dispensations to his church, aided by the full splendour of a noon-day sun? The former dispensation of types and shadows has passed away, to make room for the substantial blessings of the New-Testament, of which it was the precursor. Since the fulfilment of the types and sacrifices of the law in the person and works of Jesus Christ, a church has existed upon earth, whose transcending glory casts into the shade all religious dispensations that had gone before it. It is a spiritual temple, *built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.* In it Jehovah dwells, not by sensible tokens of his presence as in the temple of old—but by the sanctifying power, and comforting graces of his Holy Spirit. Its glory consists not in the splendour, or costliness of its ceremonies; but in the greatness of its privileges and the holiness of its members. *Its walls are salvation, and its gates praise.* The history of this spiritual temple, the Christian Church, confirms the general truth we have stated; for it is little else than a history of alternate revivals and declensions. And reference to a few leading facts will convince us that God's highest favours to the Christian Church have usually followed the times of her greatest depression.

How discouraging was the state of the Apostles, how low their hopes, and how gloomy their prospects, just after their Divine Master had withdrawn himself from the earth, and gone up with great triumph into heaven? He had directed them to "*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature:*" to enlighten and reform the human family: as his ambassadors, to visit all nations, and while they claimed them as his inheritance, command them to submit to his righteous sceptre. But *who* were they, thus required to undertake a work, from which archangels might have shrunk back in despair? They were poor fishermen, without learning—without reputation—without power. They might well fear that such an enterprise would expose themselves to ridicule, and their Master to contempt. True, they had the promise of power from on high, but it was yet unfulfilled. And no doubt, they were often tempted to yield

to despondency, and say, as they had after his crucifixion, "*we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.*" But at this trying season the Lord *arose and had mercy upon Zion.* The Spirit, in his miraculous gifts, was *poured* out from on high. The Apostles were then fully qualified to execute their holy commission. The Eternal God was their leader in the mighty enterprise; the word of salvation their warfare; and Omnipotent grace insured them success. "*Their sound went into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the earth.*" The Church was exalted above the systems of philosophy and idolatry; and in process of time, the banner of the cross triumphantly waved upon the proud turrets of Rome, the mistress of the world.

During the three first centuries of the Christian era, while our holy religion continued to maintain a high degree of its infant purity, the church was blessed with copious effusions of grace: God delighted to favour her, and from the fires of persecution, she even came forth more illustrious and beautiful than before.

Afterwards the Church suffered a deep and awful decline. Human wickedness, and false philosophy combined to mar her beauty and corrupt her spirit. The humility and zeal of the ministerial character gradually disappeared, and were succeeded by all the odious features of a worldly minded priesthood. The sacred office became a trade, its emoluments excited the cupidity, and its honours, the ambition of men: aspiring Ecclesiastics trampled upon the rights of their brethren, and usurped powers not included in the commission of either of the three orders of the primitive Church, till at length the Bishop of Rome declared himself superior to his brethren of the same order, and claimed jurisdiction over the whole christian world. Then prelatical usurpation, properly so called, reached its utmost limits, and *the man of sin* was firmly seated in the chair of supreme authority, which he had thus iniquitously obtained.

As companions to this corruption of the ministry, the Church was cursed at the same time with a departure from the purity of evangelical doctrines, and the spirituality of christian wor-

ship. The waters of life were poisoned at the fountain by those who were appointed to guard their purity. The volume of revelation was withheld from the faithful: the devices of antichrist were substituted for the commandments of God; and wicked men's traditions, and old wives' fables, usurped the place of the instructions of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. The worship of the sanctuary, with which as a raiment of pure gold the virgin daughter of Zion had been clothed, was now exchanged for the tawdry apparel of a harlot, thickly spangled with mummeries and fooleries, borrowed from the superstitious rites of the Pagans. The moral gangrene continued to spread till the body of the Church was festered to the very core: priests and people, with few exceptions, became one dead mass of spiritual putrefaction, and the Devil so completely triumphed, that religion was made the pander of avarice and lust; the kingdom of heaven was, as it were, thrown into the market; commissioners were sent forth to sell at the corners of the streets, and on the highway, indulgencies to commit the most atrocious crimes; and for a small *douceur* to a venal priesthood, men might purchase an exemption from the pains of purgatory, and a title to the joys of paradise.

The period to which we have alluded, might indeed be called a dark age—for a moral darkness pervaded the Church, which, like that of Egypt, might be felt. Here and there, only, one was to be found who sighed over the abominations and wickedness which prevailed: here and there only, a true son of Zion might be seen who *took pleasure in her stones, and favoured the dust thereof.* But in this midnight of the world, God's *time, his set time to favour Zion,* came. He arose and had mercy upon her. The morning of a brighter day dawned upon her altars,—and a flood of purifying light was poured into her sanctuaries. The Spirit of Grace was dispensed in all his saving energies. Luther, Melancthon and Calvin;—Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, and their fellow labourers, were prompted, as we doubt not, by a Divine influence, to undertake the much needed and laudable work of reforming the faith of the church, and the lives of its members. There was then a most glorious re-

vival of the work of God, which spread through different nations; produced a material change in the character of Christendom; and will transmit most valuable benefits to the latest generations of mankind.*

When the holy boldness, ardour and energy, which accompanied the blessed Reformation, had in some measure disappeared: when the spirit of religious slumber had come upon most of the Protestant Churches, and that from which ours sprang, was threatened with the torpor of spiritual death; one of the Lord's *set times to favour Zion*, arrived. A few pious young men, shut up within academic walls, pursuing a course of studies preparatory for the sacred office, *took pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favoured the dust thereof.* Animated by love to Christ and the souls of men, they went forth to blow the trumpet in Zion, and wake up a slumbering world. They brought to light those precious doctrines of grace, which had been buried beneath the accumulated dust of ages; preached the gospel in *demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*, and with a zeal, second only to that of Apostles and Reformers, submitted cheerfully to labours and persecutions for their Master's glory.

However much we may be disposed to lament, (as we sincerely do) a schism in the visible church, which arose out of this revival, and to condemn some minor evils which have followed in its train, we cannot withhold our approbation from a work which, when the sparks of religion were smouldering in the ashes, kindled them anew, and caused the flame of evangelical piety to blaze once more upon almost every altar in the Protestant world.

In our own age, we have had a most striking illustration of the general truth, that the time of Zion's depression is preparatory to God's time of favouring her. If there has been one age of the church's history which might be called an age of persecution;—another, which might be called an age of darkness;—and a third, which might be styled the age of indolence and inaction;—this, in which we live, may be distinguished from all

*For an able exposition of the blessings, civil, intellectual and moral, derived from the Reformation, see Villiers' Prize Essay.

which have gone before it, as *the age of benevolent enterprise and labour.* And it is worthy of remark, that, this promising and hopeful period should have been preceded by such depression and sorrow;—that the Providence of God should have selected a time of revolution and war; when Christian nations, so called, were lavishing their blood and treasure in political strife and conflict,—as the period for putting in motion that immense moral inquiry which is so powerfully operating in aid of *His* cause who *came to save men's lives, and not to destroy them.* The day of tumult, bloodshed and war—when the spirit of Atheism, like a demon broke loose from the pit, threatened to lay waste all that was lovely in the character, and all that was precious in the hopes of man;—was the birth-day of Bible and Missionary Societies. "The bow of God has not, as usual, illuminated the summer cloud—but shot across the blackest tempest: the seeds of peace have been sown in the track of contending armies;—and at the very period of utmost despondency; when the visible Church was threatened with extinction,—*God's time, yea, his set time* to favour Zion, arrived. An impulse was then given to Christian benevolence, which it had never felt before; and such has been the multiplication of charitable efforts, that there is now scarcely a town, or village, or hamlet in Christendom, that is not adorned by some society which aims to do its part towards the hastening on of that time of Christ's universal reign, so often predicted by the Prophets, as in the glowing language of the Seraphim;—and the anticipation of which makes the hearts of the pious leap with rapturous joy. Christians cannot believe that those spiritual lights which have been so generally kindled up in the firmament of the Church, will shine in vain, or be permitted to go out, till they have scattered the cheering beams of the gospel throughout the gloomy regions of idolatry and sin. They confidently hope that the way is preparing for the millennial reign of Christ upon earth; that many generations will not pass away, before the glorious *latter day* will dawn when *all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest.*

II. Having thus proved and illustrated the general proposition drawn from the text that God *has fixed* times for favouring Zion,

and that they generally follow periods of the greatest darkness and depression;—I proceed, as was proposed, to consider the text as applicable *to the state and prospects of our own Church and the duties of its* members.

1. It is painful to walk over the ruins of an ancient city and see the monuments of art and the pride of ages crumbled into dust,—the temples of philosophy and religion mingling their fragments; and the former abodes of men—the palace of the prince and the hovel of the beggar, all thrown together in one promiscuous and undistinguishable mass of desolation. How much more painful is it, in imagination to walk over the ruins of Zion; to see her beautiful places laid waste; all that pertained to God's worship or was suited to his abode, defaced and destroyed; and his habitation itself turned into a heap of stones and rubbish, and almost buried in the dust! But this employment, distressing and sorrowful as it is, may nevertheless be profitable, and suggest many valuable lessons of wisdom and morality, which we have not time at present to enumerate. With what profit did the Jews, after the rebuilding of their city and Temple, reflect upon their once desolate condition, and the causes to which it was attributable! They might thence deduce many motives to repent of their unfaithfulness, and to stimulate them to more uniform obedience for the time to come.

Even so, we, my brethren, may review the once fallen and gloomy state of our Zion with great profit. We may make this review with the mingled feelings of sorrow and joy with which a man restored from the most alarming stage of fever, reflects on the danger from which he has been recovered;—or with which the wrecked mariner, who has reached the shore, looks back upon the raging element that so recently threatened to overwhelm him. Our Church, in a spiritual sense was sick, nigh unto death; but God has had mercy on her. She was once a moral wreck, just ready in human estimation, to sink down into oblivion and ruin: but she has been rescued by the high hand and outstretched arm of her divine protector.

2. It can hardly be expected that your preacher should attempt even a sketch, much less a detailed account of those fea-

tures of lukewarmness and depression, which once characterised our Church. We are all too familiar with her history, to render it necessary ; we are all too much in love with her beauties, to dwell with any thing like satisfaction upon the blemishes, by which she was once disfigured. We all know from the testimony of our predecessors, that she was once in a state of comparative *darkness*. She retained, indeed, that invaluable Liturgy, which, like a polished mirror, concentrates and reflects the rays of scriptural truth :—but alas, where were the minds that relished its beauties, or the hearts that glowed with the fire of its devotions ! Some light shone in the desk,—but were there not some instances at least, in which the inverted Pulpit was put as an extinguisher upon that light ? Unless our traditional ecclesiastical history has been deeply imbued with the spirit of fable,—the places due to the Fathers and Reformers, were sometimes occupied by Plato, Seneca, and Epictetus ; or philosophers of less wisdom and virtue,—and the cold inefficient precepts of a heartless morality were inculcated, to the great neglect of the life giving, comforting, sanctifying doctrines of the gospel. There were doubtless some melancholy examples of the *priests prophesying falsely, and the people loving to have it so.*

3. We all know that our Church in this country, and more especially in this southern section of it, was once in *ruins*. As the established religion of an unpopular government, it had but a slender hold upon the affections of the people at large : and when at the period of our revolutionary struggle it was generally abandoned by the clergy who had received their support from the hand of the government which was overthrown, the sickly existence it had before possessed, seemed threatened with utter extinction. In many instances, the houses of worship were only used as shelters for the cattle of the field : the birds of the air, secure and undisturbed, built their nests within the deserted walls ; and by man, (less reverent than either,) the very ornaments of the Altar were profaned and appropriated to unhallowed uses.

Would to God that the desolation of material temples were the only ruins that must be pictured on the page of the church's

history. But where, at that time, was the spiritual temple? "the lively stones built upon the good foundation as a habitation of God through the Spirit?" Where were the repentance, faith, self-denial, holiness, benevolence,—which are the brightest, and only true ornaments of the Church of God? Where were the men, in the midst of our Jerusalem, who sighed, and wept over its faded glories? the *elect, who called unto him day and night*, to cause his face to shine upon her desolations? The true sons of Zion, who *took pleasure in her stones, and favoured the dust thereof?*

Some there were of this description, whose characters and lines are well known tous: and probably the Lord had many of his secret ones, whom we shall never hear of, till their humble, and zealous labours for the promotion of his glory and kingdom shall be made known at the judgment of the great day.

In imagination, I am carried back to former days!—I behold one of those faithful servants of Jesus Christ, like a solitary mourner, seated in the night season by the decayed and crumbling altar of God! The cold moonbeams display to his view the melancholy spectacle of broken arches—tottering walls, and falling columns: while the winds, which passing over the ruins agitate the strings of his neglected harp, fill the echoing aisles with the pathetic strains of despondency and wo! It was immediately after such a period of sadness and desolation,—when the children of Zion *took pleasure in her stones and favoured the dust thereof, that God's time, yea, his set time to favour her*, arrived. Now, all her sighing priests, and mourning people may be comforted, and tune their harps anew. The dark and cheerless night is past—the dawn of a bright day has broken forth upon the mountains! The walls of Zion shall be rebuilt, and greatly enlarged: for *God is causing his face to shine upon his sanctuary which was desolate.*

4. With pleasure do we throw the veil of oblivion over the past, and turn our attention to the cheering *prospects of the future.* We might find enough to confirm our hope, that God's set time to favour our Zion has arrived, from the present state

of the Christian world at large. The church universal is now flourishing beyond any former example; and we might reasonably hope that our branch of it would receive a share of the common blessing; for we believe her to be at least as Apostolic in her ministry, as pure in her worship, and as scriptural in her doctrines, as any Church in Christendom. It was said, by a late distinguished Prelate, of one portion of the Christian world, that they had "a Church without religion;"—and of another, that they had "religion without a Church,"—it is our glory and boast that we have both united; and our motto is, "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," While we continue to sustain divine institutions in their purity—and hold Christian doctrines in their integrity, we may with confidence expect a full share of his blessing, who is emphatically the God of truth and of order.

5. There are also many things in the *present condition of our Church,* which afford hopeful indications of the Lord's regard for her, and that his set time to favour her has come. Though once in a state of dependence upon the mother Church, for a supply of clergymen whose ministrations she could acknowledge;—her episcopacy has been for years past well established, and ample provision is now made for a continuance of the mystic succession to the latest generations—and for its transmission to the remotest bounds of the republic. Though for a season there was danger that her members would separate into different independent communities, and thus, exhibit the motley aspect of some other Protestant denominations; she is now, and has for a long time been, as "a city which is at unity in itself," under the government of a wise, and liberal constitution. Though there was at one time, cause to fear that her Liturgy would be mutilated, and her articles of faith materially changed; yet by the merciful superintendence of Divine Providence, her formulary of doctrine and worship have been preserved in their original purity, not only as one of the most valuable fruits of the blessed Reformation, but as streams flowing from the undefiled fountain of Primitive Christianity. We are permitted to use the same language of prayer and praise which aided the devotions

of Martyrs at the stake, and to subscribe the same creeds which they signed, and ratified with their blood.

6. With a few exceptions, it may now be said, that we no longer mourn over decayed Churches and tottering altars; but we rejoice to see the desolations of many generations repaired, and new temples raised, not only in the midst of a crowded population, but also in the wilderness, to the honour of God our Saviour. This goodly tree which the right hand of the Lord hath planted on this Continent, has already become deeply rooted, has spread its branches to the ocean, and its boughs to the western waters, and many of the inhabitants of the North and the South repose under the shadow of it with great delight.

Let me not be misunderstood. Let no one suppose that I would measure the degree of God's favour to any Church by its outward prosperity. No. *Christ's kingdom is not of this world.* It consists not in splendid Churches, wealthy congregations, or a numerous and learned priesthood. Nor are the elements of its prosperity, found merely in a divinely constituted ministry, a primitive Liturgy, or an orthodox system of doctrines. No Church can be considered as truly prosperous except so far as its ministers are faithful, and its members holy. There may be many splendid Church edifices in a Christian community; there may be large and respectable assemblies often convened in them; there may be many professions of attachment to the externals and paraphernalia of an ecclesiastical establishment: there may be much of wealth, and talent, and influence combined in its support; in short, there may be every outward show of prosperity; and yet, little or nothing may be seen, or heard of that *kingdom of God which is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* There may be much in the showy and splendid exterior to dazzle the eye of a superficial beholder: there may be much in the flattering and widely trumpeted report of prosperity to delight the ear of partiality and friendship: and yet such a community as to all its spiritual interests, may be withering under the frown of *His* displeasure who "looketh not on the outward appearance, but looketh on the heart:"—it may be in no better condition than that Church

of Laodicea which thought herself *rich and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing; and knew not that she was poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.* She may be by reason of her lukewarmness, so offensive and loathsome to the Great Head of the Church, that he may be just ready to exterminate her—or, in the strong language of the Revelations, "*spew her out of his mouth.*"

It is not, therefore, merely from the increased outward prosperity of the Church, that I infer that God's time to favour her has come. None can be more fully convinced than I am that many converts may be made to Episcopacy, where none are made to Jesus Christ. And low indeed would my hopes be respecting the prosperity of our Church, if there were no better indications of it than a swelling of the boastful cry "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." But it must be evident to every calm and candid observer that *the spirit of genuine piety is increasing, and spreading its holy influence among us.* The Children of the Church *take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.* There is a growing disposition to go back to first principles: to sweep away the dust which has been suffered to accumulate upon them, and examine those foundation stones of our Zion, which were laid by a divine hand, as well as the goodly superstructure of evangelical doctrines and venerable forms, which the saints and martyrs erected upon them to be a perpetual monument to the glory of God's grace. This growing disposition *to stand in the way and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way*—tends to produce an oblivion and forgetfulness of those differences of sentiment which are of modern origin;—to create around us that pure atmosphere of primitive love, in which the demon of party spirit can neither live nor breathe;—and to enkindle that fire of missionary zeal, which will purify us from our corruptions of faith and practice,—burn up our dross,—and by God's blessing, melt us down into one vessel of pure gold, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use. He must have been a very careless observer of occurring events, who has not remarked since our engagement as a Church in the work of missions, a very perceptible

increase of fidelity in the clergy, of godliness in the laity, and of unity among all. These are indications of God's favour to our Zion, which are not to be mistaken, and they should awaken in our souls, the most lively sentiments of gratitude. God grant that these sure tokens of his love may be abundantly increased! The Lord of his infinite mercy, hasten the time when the watchmen upon the walls of Zion shall see eye to eye: when there shall be but one heart and one voice among us:—and that heart filled with supreme love to our blessed Saviour—and that voice wholly employed in advocating his truth, and publishing abroad the honours of his name!

III. If then the present state of our Church indicates that one of God's set times to favour her has come—*what are the consequent duties of her members at such a time?* Shall we fold our arms and lie down to slumber, thinking to honour God's grace by saying,—the work of reviving and enlarging the Church is his, and he can accomplish it without our efforts? No, the times of God's favour, should be seasons of human diligence and exertion. O what an honour is it to be co-workers with Him! It is an honour offered to every Christian, and every Christian should strive to prove himself not wholly unworthy of it, by labouring to the utmost of his ability for the promotion of the Divine purposes of mercy to Zion. Loving the Church for the Redeemer's sake, as *the house of the living God—the pillar and ground of the truth*, he should make an avowal of his attachment in the strong language of the captives in Babylon: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; yea let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I make not thy prosperity my chief joy.*

I have so long trespassed upon your time and patience already, that I can do little more under this last head of our discourse, than to enumerate or name the *duties* which arise out of the circumstances in which we are placed, as the *means* by which we are to aid in edifying the Church of of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he purchased with his own blood.

The chief of these means are 1. The faithful preaching of the Gospel. 2. Holiness of heart and life. 3. Prayer for the

effusion of the Spirit of grace. 4. The giving a part of our personal services and property to those societies and institutions which have for their benevolent object the universal establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom. Let us, in conclusion, devote a few moments to the inquiry *whether these means are diligently employed by us?*

1. My Fathers and Brethren of the Clergy. Do we cherish the spirit of our vocation, and are we faithfully discharging the duties connected with it? Are we impressed with a strong sense of the dread responsibility of our station as ambassadors of God? Do we strive to preach as the Apostles and Reformers preached—and to live as they lived? Do we faithfully publish the truth as it is in Jesus, and declare all the counsel of God? Is it the manifest tendency and aim of our ministry to bring sinners to Jesus Christ that they may be saved from wrath through him—and edify believers in faith and love? And are we striving by the cultivation of personal piety, as well as by the zealous discharge of our official duties, to approve ourselves unto God,—so that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear we may receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away? O that we all may be found amongst the faithful men of God, who surrounded by multitudes saved through their instrumentality, will lift up their heads with joy even amidst the solemnities of the final judgment, and say,—Here are we, Lord, and the children whom thou hast given us! God forbid that any of us should be of the miserable number who have lied to the Holy Ghost, and will then appear at the bar having their robes stained with the blood of souls!

2. Let all of us, whether clergy or laity, inquire as in the presence of God, whether we are *shining as lights in the world*, so that others seeing our good works may be led to glorify our Father who is in heaven? Have our hearts been renewed by the Holy Ghost? and do we strive to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things? Ah! to what purpose is it that we have been baptized into a Church, apostolic in its ministry and government,—pure in its worship, and orthodox in its doctrines, if we know not the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and are not liv-

ing in obedience to his commandments? If we die without an experience of the power of godliness in the heart;—without repentance, faith and holiness;—all the privileges of which we can boast, will appear as swift witnesses against us at the bar of God—and serve as so many weights, heavier than a thousand millstones, to sink us down into the depths of perdition!

3. Do we pray for the *prosperity of Zion*, in our closets,—our families,—and our social assemblies? Do we earnestly entreat Almighty God to *send down upon our Bishops and other clergy, and upon the congregations committed to their charge the healthful spirit of his grace; and that they may truly please him, to pour upon them the continual dew of his blessing?* or are we like those inconsistent and deluded ones who use this prayer merely because the Church has prescribed it; but at the same time, believe, that it is rank enthusiasm to expect in this day special outpourings of the Spirit, or revivals of religion among ministers and people? My Brethren, prayer is endued with a kind of moral omnipotence;—because it moves God himself, and brings down the blessings of his grace upon the souls of men. And never can we expect to witness any extensive triumphs of the Gospel or spread of pure religion among us, till we are fervently engaged in pleading for the fulfilment of his promises in relation to the prosperity of Zion:—till our earnest, incessant,—believing cry is—THY KINGDOM COME! *O Lord, pour out thy Spirit, and revive thy work! Let thy ministers be clothed with righteousness, that thy people may sing for joy.*

4. Finally, *our prayers and our alms*, like those of Cornelius, should *go up together for a memorial before God.* If we truly pray for the prosperity of Zion, we shall freely contribute according to our ability to those institutions which are calculated to promote it. Thanks be to God there are many such institutions amongst us. In whatever department of Christian operations we may feel interested, the Church has opened channels through which the streams of our beneficence may flow for its support. Do we desire the multiplication of the numbers consecrated to the holy duties of the ministry? There are education societies, and theological seminaries which can judiciously

employ the largest donations of charity—in the blessed work of training up youthful soldiers of the cross to contend with infidelity, heresy and vice in our own land—or carry the triumphant banner of the Redeemer into the strong holds of the empire of darkness. Do you desire in the spirit of compassion, to bring back scattered and wandering flocks to the fold of the Good Shepherd—to provide for the wants, and feed with the bread of life the famishing children of our own household? The desire may be gratified by your contributions to the Society which proposes to send intelligent and pious missionaries to strengthen weak and repair decayed parishes, and to pour the light and consolations of redeeming mercy into the many habitations of ignorance and sorrow that are about to be found within the limits of this favoured Diocese. Or does your heart prompt you to take a wider range? Our "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society" will gladly receive your aid in the benevolent enterprise of civilizing and evangelizing the native tribes of this Western Continent—and in the godlike work of fulfilling the solemn injunction of the ascending Redeemer—"*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" While the larger societies can well employ the hundreds and thousands of dollars which the rich may have to bestow, they also in common with the Sunday School and the Tract Associations, will no less thankfully accept the mites of the widows, and the sanctified offerings of the poor.

O that the gifts from all classes and orders amongst us might be poured into these different departments of the Lord's treasury in a perpetually deepening and widening stream! Thus may we most emphatically show our love to the Zion of our God, and most efficiently contribute to make her the joy and praise of the whole earth. We behold the members of a corrupt and superstitious Church in foreign countries, displaying a zeal for the propagation of their erroneous faith in this favoured land of our nativity, a zeal which is measured by the donations annually, not of tens and hundreds, but of thousands and tens of thousands, and we might say hundreds of thousands, to the promotion of the object. We behold some Protestant denominations display-

ing an equal liberality in disseminating Christianity in what we believe to be imperfect and defective forms. And shall it be said, that we are less zealous in propagating our holy religion under that form in which we have received it; presenting, as we believe it does, a beautiful combination of the integrity of Christian institutions, and of the purity of Christian doctrines? I need not press you for an answer to this inquiry—for we are to receive now a practical proof of your attachment to the Church as exhibited in one of her favourite institutions.

There is not an individual here *who takes pleasure in the stones of Zion and favours the dust thereof*, who will require me to say one word to secure his approbation of the objects, or present one motive to induce him to aid the funds of "the Prayer Book and Homily Society of Maryland." It has been frequently recommended by the convention to the patronage of all the congregations in the Diocese. Its simple object is, to distribute extensively those formularies of doctrine and worship, in which the evangelical, and holy character of our Church is most plainly exhibited; and which, next to the translation of the Bible, we have been accustomed to reverence as the most precious gift of the Reformation.

Is there one here who has experienced the comforts of communion with God in the use of our incomparable Liturgy, who will not contribute his mite to this Society, and thus extend the same comforts to his poorer brethren. Is there one here who loves the Gospel of Christ, and has felt its transforming power, who will not aid in scattering abroad throughout all the habitations of ignorance and poverty, those Sermons of our Reformers and Martyrs, which bear the impress, and breathe the very spirit of the Gospel? We trust there is no heart here which is not expanded by the benevolent spirit of the occasion. No hand which is not ready to cast its gift into this treasury of the Lord. Jesus asks your gifts, as a small token of your gratitude for his infinite love. The Church asks your gifts, as a feeble expression of your attachment to her interests. The poor ask your gifts, as a testimony of your compassion for their souls. Who then *would*—who *can* resist the appeal? Go,

ye officers of the Church, and collect the gifts of piety and benevolence from this assembly! And let every one give with special reference to that day when the harvest reaped will be in proportion to the seed which has been sown—and when the Saviour will say—*inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

HYMN.

THE CHURCH.

From sin's dark thorny maze,
To Canaan's fertile plains,
A trav'ling fair one in distress,
On her beloved leans.—

Thro' fire, and flood, she goes
A weakling, more than strong;
Vents in his bosom all her woes,
And leaning, moves along.

When dangers round her press,
And darkness veils the skies:
She leans upon his righteousness,
From whence her hopes arise.

When guilt, a mighty flood,
Her trembling conscience pains;
Then on his peace procuring blood,
This trav'ling fair one leans.—

She views the cov'nant sure
Her hopes all centre there,
And on his bosom leans secure,
Whose temples bled for her.—

O'er Jordan's chilling flood,
When call'd by death to go,
She leaning on her Cov'nant God,
Shall pass triumphant thro'.